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DEFENCE

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OF THE

ABSOLUTION

GIVEN TO

Sr. WILLIAM PERKINS,

At the Place of Execution, April the 3d. 1696.

By
Jeremy Collier

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A
DEFENCE
OF THE
ABOLITION
GIVEN TO
ST. WILLIAM PERKINS.

At the Place of Execution, April the 3d. 1806.

DEFENCE

OF THE

Abolition given to Sir William Perkins at the Place of Execution
April the 3d.

My being present and in some measure Officiating at the Place of Execution on Friday last, has been extreemly misunderstood. The *Weekly Intelligence* together with the *Remarker*, have censured this Action with a great deal of Liberty, and Heat. I thank God I am not easily disturbed with intemperate Language, especially when 'tis given without Occasion. So that if Matters had gone no farther, I could have passed over the ill Usage and said nothing. I confess having received notice that some Persons of Figure threatned me with Imprisonment, I took a little care of my self; and as it happen'd not without reason. For on Monday about Twelve at Night, six or eight Persons rushed into my Lodgings, broke open a Trunck, and seiz'd some Papers of Value, tho' perfectly Inoffensive, and Foreign to their Purpose. And since, I understand there is a Bill found against me for *High Misdemeanors*. And now one would think I had done something very extraordinary.

I shall therefore make a brief Report of Matters of Fact, and leave the World to judge, whether all these Censures and Severities are deserved or not.

Sir *William Perkins* (whom I had not seen for four or five Years last past) after his Tryal, desired me to come to him in order to his Preparation for another World. I accordingly visited him in *Newgate*, as I thought my self obliged by my Character. I was put in the List of those who had leave to see him by Publick Order, and had the first two Days the Liberty of conversing with him in Private. Afterwards I was not permitted to Speak, or Pray with him alone, a *Keeper* being always present. At last even this Permission was recall'd, insomuch that I could never see him from *Wednesday Morning, April the 1st.* till *Friday* at the place of Execution. Sir *William* being under an Expectation of Death from the time of his Sentence, had given me the State of his Conscience, and therefore desired the Solemn Absolution of the Church, might be Pronounced to him by me, the last Day. And understanding I was refused Admittance on *Friday Morning*, he sent me Word that he would gladly see me at the Place of Execution. I went thither, and gave him the Absolution he requested, it being impracticable for me to do it elsewhere. This Office I perform'd Word for Word in Form, as it stands in the *Mistation of the Sick*. And now where lies the great Crime of all this. When a Man has declared his Sorrow for all the Faults, and Miscarriages of his Life, and qualified himself for the Priviledge of Absolution, with what Justice could it be denied him? Ought not Dying Persons to be Supported in their last Agonies, and pass into the other World with all the Advan-

rage the Church can give them. I am surpris'd,
 for regular a Proceeding as this, it should give so
 much Offence, and make so much a Noise as I per-
 ceive it has done. Some People I understand are
 displeas'd at the Office being perform'd with *Imposi-*
tion of Hands. Now this is not only an Innocent,
 but an Ancient Ceremony of Absolution. 'Twas
 the general Practice of the Primitive Church in
 such cases, long before there were any Exceptions to
 the *Roman Communion.* 'Tis in the Opinion of se-
 veral Fathers, and good Modern Expositors refer'd
 to by the Apostle (1 Tim. 4. 14.) It is likewise pre-
 scribed the *Assisting Presbyters* in our own Ordination
Form. But I suppose I need say no more in defence of
 this Circumstance. To proceed. Others seem
 very much shock'd at the Thing it self; and think it
 a strange Presumption to admit a Person charged
 with so high a Crime, to the benefit of Absolution.
 With submission, this is concluding a great deal too
 fast. Are all People damned that are cast in a Ca-
 pital Indictment? If so, to what purpose are they
 visited by Divines, why are they exhorted to Re-
 pentance, and have Time allow'd them to fit them
 for Death? But if they may be acquitted hereafter,
 notwithstanding their Condemnation here; If they
 may be recover'd by Recollection, by Repentance,
 and Resignation, why should the Church refuse them
 her Pardon on Earth, when she believes 'tis pass'd
 in Heaven? The Power of the Keys was given for this
 purpose, that the Ministers of God might bind or
 loose, as the Disposition of the Person required. The lat-
 ter sincerely I believed to be Sr. William's Case: I judg'd
 him to have a full Right to all the Priviledges of Com-
 munion: And therefore had I deny'd him Absolution
 upon his Request, I had fail'd in my Duty, and gone
 against

against the Authority both of the *Ancient* and *English Church*. If 'tis said that the Nature of this Gentleman's Charge required his being Absolved in Private. To this I answer, so he had been, had I been permitted to visit him the last Morning. But this Liberty was refused me more than once. And I hope I shall not be blamed for Impossibilities of other Mens making. In short, he seem'd very desirous of Absolution at my Hands, as being the only Person acquainted with his Condition. Privately 'twas not in my Power to give it him; So that he must either receive it Publickly from me, or not at all. But Sir *William* confess'd himself acquainted with the intended *Affassination*. Pray did he confess it to me, and have I revealed any Part of his Confession? Then I had been guilty of *High Misdemeanor* indeed. I had broke the 13th. Canon, and been Pronounced *Irregular* by the Church. And he that falls under *Irregularity*, is for ever after incapable of Executing the Office of a Priest. (Dr. *Heylin's* *Introduct. to Cyprian. Angl. p. 6.*) I confess there is an Exception in the Canon, but that does not reach the Case in Hand, even upon the largest Supposition. Well! But Sir *William* own'd this Charge before the Committee. How could I know that? I neither saw Sir *William* after his Examination, till Friday Noon, nor the *Votes* which mentioned it till after that Time. But he confess'd it in his *Paper*. What then? Which way does the *Paper* concern me? 'Tis well known Sir *William Perkins* was a Man of Sense, and bred to Law and Letters, and needed no help to assist him in Writing a few Lines. Besides, I was not permitted to come near him for more than two Days before he suffer'd: Neither was he allow'd so much as Pen and Ink till the last Morning. Then it was that

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he penn'd his *Speech*, as *I* am told by those who were present; and having read it before the *Keeper*, deliver'd a Copy of it to a Friend, which was not shew'd to me till after the *Execution*. Indeed, *I* did believe he would leave some *Paper* behind him, both because 'tis customary upon such sad Occasions; and because on *Tuesday* Night when he expected Death on *Wednesday*, he desired Pen, Ink and Paper, for that purpose.

And now after all, *I* desire to know in what single Circumstance *I* have misbehaved my self, or done any thing unbecoming my Profession? 'Tis very hard a Man must be Persecuted for Performing the Obligations of his Office, and the Duties of common Friendship, and Humanity? As for any Methods of *Murder*, *I* dislike them no less than those who rail loudest; and nothing but a Mercenary Malice could suggest the contrary. But if the Functions of the Priesthood, and the Assistances of Religion, and the Reading the Publick *Liturgy* are grown a Crime, *I* am not concerned at the Imputation. *I* hope the complying Clergy will take some care to check the Disorders, and inform the ignorance of their People a little better. If they are unreprieved for these slanderous Excesses, their Pastors must one Day expect to account for it.

As for those in *Power*, 'tis possible they may have been govern'd by Mis-reports, and suddain Resentment: if so, second Thoughts, and the Reason of the Case, will put a stop to their Severities. And that this may be the issue of the Business, *I* think my self obliged to wish as well for their sakes, as my own.